

ROBESPIERRE, DANTON, AND THE *LEVÉE EN MASSE*

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From this moment, until that time when the enemies shall have been expelled from the territory of the Republic, all Frenchmen are in permanent requisition for the service of the armies.

The young people shall go to combat; the married men shall forge arms and transport food; the women shall make tents [and] uniforms and shall serve in hospitals; the children shall turn old linen into bandages; the old men shall have themselves taken to the public squares, to excite the courage of the warriors [and] to preach the hatred of kings and the unity of the Republic.¹

SO READS the first article of one of the most celebrated decrees of the French Revolution, the mobilization decree enacted by the Convention under the leadership of its Committee of Public Safety on August 23, 1793. The decree was more than rhetoric, and it contributed largely both to the subsequent conquests of the armies of the Revolution and Napoleon and (in the still longer run) to the institutionalizing of "total war."²

It is not, however, with the question of the consequences of the decree but, rather, with its origins, the circumstances which gave rise to the decree, that this article is concerned: the terrifying multiple crisis of the summer of 1793; the amorphous demand for a *levée en masse*, or mass rising, which this crisis produced; the various groups of revolutionaries, struggling at once against the crisis and against one another, each attempt-

ing to seize control over this notion of the *levée en masse* and to reshape it in the mold of its own concern. This story of the successive transformations of the *levée en masse* provides, in turn, an insight into the politics of revolutionary France on the eve of the Terror and, most particularly, into the politics of Robespierre.

I

By June 2, 1793, an insurrection at Paris had achieved the purge from the National Convention of the leaders of the Girondins or republican moderates; and since that time the deputies of the Mountain, on the Convention Left, had directed the destinies of France. At the end of July, seven weeks later, the crisis challenging their leadership was very severe; and it had several aspects, each of them capable of inspiring demands for a *levée en masse* of one form or another.

France remained at war against the powers of the First Coalition; and this war was going badly. The Austrians and the Prussians had invaded France from the northeast; the Spaniards were piercing the Pyrenees; the coasts were under British blockade. The French were forced to surrender the strongholds of Condé, Mainz, and Valenciennes in quick succession to the enemy; the French armies were retreating; there seemed little chance of preventing the invaders from marching to Paris.³ There was civil war as well. The Vendéan revolt of the roy-

¹ *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, 1st ser., 1787-99 (82 vols.; Paris, 1867-1914), LXXII (Aug. 23, 1793), 674.

² See, for example, Marcel Reinhard, *Le Grand Carnot* (Paris, 1950-52), II, 101, 103-6.

³ G. Pariset, *La Révolution (1792-99)* (Paris, 1920), pp. 145-46.

alist west of France continued, inadequately combatted by brutal incompetents selected for leadership from among the revolutionary militants of Paris.⁴ Although the "federalist revolt" in favor of the proscribed Girondins had largely petered out, it continued to inspire the great cities of the south, Marseilles, Toulon, Lyon.

For the ordinary Parisian sans-culotte, the foreign war and the civil war were of less immediate concern than their consequence, the shortage of food. The summer of 1793 was a time of long queues at the doors of the Paris bakers and of little bread, of much hunger and much unrest. Dangerous pressures were mounting from below, especially from the poorer sections of Paris: demands, increasingly insistent, for the requisition of grain by one means or another, for action against merchants suspected of hoarding supplies in the expectation of higher prices, for further price controls, for the punishment of officials: demands transmitted upward by the local officials of the sections to the magistrates of the Commune serving all of Paris, and by them to the Convention, the ministry, and the Committee of Public Safety. These demands, for a resumption of government control over economic life such as France had known under the absolute monarchy, were voiced most particularly by certain popular leaders of the poorer sections, the *enragés*; and they were listened to, if unhappily, by Montagnard deputies who knew the latent power of insurrectional pressures which they themselves had successfully exploited in the past.⁵

Such military and economic pressures as these quite naturally frightened all

those of the revolutionary left who exercised responsibilities they were not able to fulfil, at the same time that they prodded ambitions which had not yet been rewarded. The mounting penalties for failure so intensified the rivalries dividing the revolutionaries that some of these became mortal. There was rivalry between the *enragé* spokesmen for the Paris sections and the ultra-terrorist "Hébertist" officials of the Commune and of the ministry of war, competitors for the sans-culotte retainers of the recently martyred Marat. There was rivalry between these Hébertists, whose star was in the political ascendant, and the deputies close to Danton, who had been retired recently (July 10) from the Committee of Public Safety he had previously dominated: a rivalry finding expression particularly in a struggle for control over the appointment of generals and the direction of military operations. And there was rivalry between each of these three groups (though on different issues) and the increasingly powerful Committee of Public Safety.⁶

These rivalries contributed to the concern with which certain members of the Convention, Robespierre particularly, viewed the possibility of putting the new Montagnard constitution into operation. It had by now been ratified by primary assemblies throughout France, whose delegates, perhaps as many as eight thousand of them, were already en route to Paris to participate in the great festival scheduled for August 10, when the first anniversary of the overthrow of the monarchy was to be celebrated and when the new constitution was to be solemnly proclaimed.⁷

⁴ The best known of the *enragés* were Jacques Roux, Leclerc of Lyon, and Varlet.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-32.

⁵ Albert Mathiez, *La vie chère et le mouvement social sous la terreur* (Paris, 1927), pp. 242-90.

⁷ Barère gave the number 8,000 (see *A.P.*, LXXII [Aug. 12, 1793], 100). There were probably far fewer.

Proclamation of the constitution implied new governing institutions and new elections; and new elections might return a Girondin majority from the provinces. Men who had recently obtained control over the Convention illegally and in the face of a major crisis quite naturally hesitated to jeopardize this power, however constitutionally. Yet, not to put the constitution into effect also had its drawbacks; for this might suggest to Parisians on the revolutionary left, as well as to provincials on the counter-revolutionary right, that constitution-making had been no more than a farce, an expedient for tricking the people into temporarily accepting Montagnard leadership.⁸

It was under these circumstances of enormous difficulty that the Convention, on July 27, approved the appointment of Robespierre to the Committee of Public Safety. What was his reading of the crisis and on what aspect of it did he lay his emphasis? What did he propose on the subject of the *levée en masse*? Did he promote, or did he oppose, the mobilization decreed on August 23? And, does the part which he played in this story permit us to indorse Mathiez' eloquent statement concerning Robespierre's relationship to the people?

The coming of Robespierre to power opens a new era. . . . [It] meant that . . . those directing the republic would no longer deceive the people; that they would listen to its complaints, would stoop to its miseries,

⁸ In the weeks to follow Robespierre would be upset by proposals from Dantonists, Hébertists, and *enragés*, all of which assumed that the constitution was to be put into practice. See *Gazette national* or *Le Moniteur universel*, No. 224 (Aug. 12, 1793), p. 953; A. Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins* (6 vols.; Paris, 1889-97), V, 328-30 (concerning the demands made by Vincent, an Hébertist); and *A.P.*, LXXIII (Aug. 26, 1793), 56-57 (speech of Claire Lacombe).

would associate it with their own effort to save the fatherland.⁹

II

On the very next day, July 28, Sébastien Lacroix delivered to the general assembly of his section (Unité) a speech which was later printed under the title "Not a Moment To Lose."¹⁰

Lacroix was a journalist, a revolutionary zealot, and a friend of Danton who, as minister of justice a year before, had named Lacroix as one of his agents on special mission in behalf of the ministry (and of the revolutionary Commune).¹¹ More recently, on April 5, Danton had helped Lacroix bring before the Convention a petition requesting a general inventory of the bread supply and a subsidized nationwide reduction of the price of bread.¹²

In his speech "Not a Moment To Lose" Lacroix proposed that general mobilization be proclaimed at the time of the great reunion of August 10: "May the friends of the fatherland arm themselves . . .; may those without weapons bring up the ammunition; may the women bring the food and make bread. . . . eight days of enthusiasm can do more

⁹ Mathiez, *La Révolution française* (3 vols.; Paris, 1954), III, 24-25.

¹⁰ Mathiez, *La vie chère*, pp. 302-3. His speech was printed by the section and copies were transmitted to the Convention, the Executive Council, and the Committee of Public Safety.

¹¹ Gérard Walter, in Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1952), II, 1434. Henri Wallon, *Histoire du Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris* (6 vols.; Paris, 1880-82), III, 196-209. Pierre Caron, *La Première Terreur* (1792), I, *Les missions du conseil exécutif provisoire et de la commune de Paris* (Paris, 1950), 22. Following this mission Lacroix and his partner Ronsin were accused of complicity in the massacre which took place at Meaux. Ronsin would become, later, the "Hébertist" commander of the "Revolutionary Army."

¹² Mathiez, *La vie chère*, pp. 172-75; *A.P.*, LXI (Apr. 5, 1793), 349-52, 357-59.

for the fatherland than eight years of combat." In the course of this plea, Lacroix asked for an inventory of men fit for combat, or grains, weapons, wagons, and all other objects necessary to the general defense; he asked for prompt manufacture of arms and munitions; and he asked for a year's provisioning of Paris. Evidently the mobilization which he asked was intended to remedy the economic needs of Paris as well as the military needs of France.

Eight days later, on August 5, a delegation from the Paris Commune brought before the Convention what seemed to be a more narrowly military version of Lacroix's proposal. Another friend of Danton, the assistant *procureur* R  al, was the speaker:

For some months it has been repeated: the people must show itself, the people must rise en masse. . . . This appeal to the nation must no longer be an empty rhetorical formula. The moment has come, the hour has sounded, when these great measures are going to receive their full execution. By the decree of May 4, all Frenchmen are divided into four classes. . . . Decree that the list be drawn up instantly [and] that a general drawing determine in each class who will be in immediate and permanent requisition.¹³

R  al did not refer to the threat of hunger which was gripping the poor of Paris (and harassing their leaders); but a curious error on his part enables us to glimpse an economic objective behind his proposal. The law of four classes to which he referred was not enacted on May 4 (as he said) but on May 30.¹⁴ May

¹³ *A.P.*, LXX (Aug. 5, 1793), 294–95. R  al had spoken in similar vein the day before, in a speech to the General Assembly of the Paris Commune (see *Moniteur*, No. 219 [Aug. 7, 1793], p. 931).

¹⁴ L. L  vy-Schneider, "L'Arm  e et la Convention," in E. Faguet, *L'  uvre sociale de la R  volution* (Paris, 1901), p. 427. The four classes included, respectively: (1) citizens 16 to 25; (2) those 25 to 35; (3) those 35 to 45; (4) all others

4 did, however, see the passage of another important decree concerned with the conscription of troops: a decree specifying the various subsidies to be provided by the state to the various members of the families of soldiers and sailors in the service of the Republic.¹⁵

By this time many of the *f  d  r  s*, or delegates from the primary assemblies, had already reached Paris; and an anxious government was taking pains to guide their energies into harmless channels. The Committee of Public Safety had already unofficially posted agents on the various roads approaching Paris, their mission to search the delegates, read their mail, and arrest any suspects among them.¹⁶ The Committee also paid the expenses involved in a special surveillance of the delegates during their stay in Paris; and, after the tenth, would be quite eager to speed the parting guests. On August 5, the Paris Jacobins offered them the use of their quarters as their chief assembly point—an offer which combined hospitality with a desire to direct their activities.¹⁷

able to carry arms (*A.P.*, LXV [May 30, 1793], 609). It is suggestive that R  al envisaged a drawing from all four classes (though starting with the first).

¹⁵ *Moniteur*, No. 126 (May 6, 1793), pp. 555–56; No. 127 (May 7, 1793), p. 559. Moreover, it may be noted that the *Moniteur's* summary of city government activity on Aug. 4, 1793 contains repeated references to the complaints of Parisians over the food shortage but only one direct reference to the war (No. 219 [Aug. 7, 1793], p. 932).

¹⁶ Mathiez, *R  volution*, III, 35. When a deputy, Thibault, called these somewhat inhospitable procedures to the attention of his colleagues of the Convention, he found himself denounced by Robespierre and Couthon as an accomplice of the federalist rebels and of foreign courts. See also *Moniteur*, No. 219 (Aug. 7, 1793), pp. 931–32.

¹⁷ *A.P.*, LXX (Aug. 6, 1793), 346–47. Hence, when a group of provincial delegates on the sixth petitioned the Convention for a meeting hall, they were immediately suspect in the eyes of good Jacobins like Leonard Bourdon (and

The night before, the deputy Chabot, who was close to Robespierre, had warned his audience at the chapel of the Jacobins that moderates had accepted the constitution only in the hope of electing moderates and royalists to a new legislature and of sending to the revolutionary tribunal the patriots who had made the Revolution.¹⁸ Chabot's theme was taken up and amplified on the night of the sixth by one of the delegates from the primary assemblies, Claude Royer, a curé from Chalon-sur-Saône, in Burgundy, who told his Jacobin audience: "On May 31 you struck down the right wing; it has played dead in order to escape the rage of the people; but you may be certain that it still lives and that it directs in the shadow the threads of a great conspiracy."¹⁹ Royer indorsed Chabot's warnings,²⁰ and then added:

others), who proposed their imprisonment as opponents of the Convention.

¹⁸ Aulard, *Jacobins*, V, 327–28. Chabot was a member of the "Committee of General Security"; and his collaboration with Robespierre appears to have concerned, particularly, the pursuit of the Girondins, at whose trial in October Chabot would testify at very great length. Indications of close relations between Chabot and Robespierre may be found in the "Mémoires de Garat," in Buchez and Roux (eds.), *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française* (40 vols.; Paris, 1834–38), XVIII, 444–45, 415–16; and in Galart de Montjoie, *Histoire de la Conjuration de Maximilien Robespierre* (Paris, 1796), pp. 116, 121.

¹⁹ *Discours prononcé dans la Société des Jacobins le 6 août 1793 . . . par le citoyen Claude Royer, envoyé de Chalon-sur-Saône à la grande réunion des français le 10 août* (Bibliothèque nationale, Lb 40 763). Royer was the speaker but the phrasing of this passage particularly resembles the language used with reference to the Girondins by Barère in behalf of the Committee of Public Safety on September 5, and also the language used by Robespierre, speaking in his own behalf, on September 25, 1793. See Buchez and Roux, XXIX, 43–45; Hippolyte Carnot and M. David (ed.), *Memoirs of Bertrand Barère*, II, 304; *Moniteur*, No. 270 (Sept. 27, 1793), p. 1145.

²⁰ "Chabot told you yesterday that envoys of

To regard the acceptance of the constitutional act as the thermometer of public opinion would be to delude oneself strangely. . . . There exists a vast conspiratorial plan, and this plan involves putting the people to sleep on the brink of the abyss, by making it believe that the Revolution is over; that what one calls the reign of order should begin; that revolutionary laws are no longer necessary, because the constitution is to suffice for everything and to rally all spirits.

The plan also involves provoking the prompt convocation of the primary assemblies to elect the legislature. . . . This is the wish of the *feuillants*, moderates and federalists, aristocrats and counter-revolutionaries of every kind.

The implication is clear: one must thwart all these conspirators by clinging to an unconstitutional status quo.

Royer then proposed a *levée en masse*. In view of this conspiracy, he asserted, there is not a moment to lose:

For four years one has shouted that the people must rise, and yet the people en masse have not yet risen; the Parisians alone have risen three times, and three times they have saved the country. . . . Yes, let us stop talking, and from August 10 may the entire Republic be the place of our sessions, the camps our rostrums, the cannon our harangues.

In thus invoking the *levée en masse* Royer gave the concept a new content. His *levée en masse* was much vaguer than that of Réal and was inspired not by economic and military considerations but (as we have seen) by urgencies of domestic politics; and it was to be directed, initially, against other Frenchmen. For Royer explained further:

To consummate this great work, may the aristocracy become, in our hands, the instrument of its own destruction. . . . Let us pre-

some *départements* have embraced the members of the right wing. . . . Chabot was right." The "yesterday" suggests that Royer's speech may have been prepared on the fifth and under the immediate stimulus of Réal's plea for a *levée en masse*.

cipitate it to the frontiers. . . . May they finally learn, these cowardly conspirators, that the patience of the people is exhausted. . . .

Yes, let us all march against the enemy, but may the bodies of the aristocrats become as many ramparts for the sans-culottes; let us place them in the front ranks; may they combat, may they conquer, with us, or be precipitated into the tomb.

Of the demand for general mobilization expressed earlier by Lacroix and Réal, only the rhetorical flourish remained. The *levée en masse* had been reinterpreted as an insurrection against domestic enemies.

Claude Royer was at once a *fédéré* and a Jacobin. At this moment, however, he reflected, not the will of the provincial assemblies which had just finished giving the constitution their overwhelming indorsement, but the aim of the governing Jacobins, the Robespierrists, to bury it.

On the following day (the seventh) the Jacobins elected Robespierre their president.²¹ Of the several aspects of the crisis engaging France, it was the political aspect which gave Robespierre most concern. He was afraid that hungry Paris might explode into insurrection; but he would not admit that there was not enough food to be had; and so he talked, instead, about British plots to provoke an insurrection by creating an artificial scarcity; and he attacked the *enragé* leaders Leclerc and Jacques Roux as "emissaries of Pitt or Cobourg" who were succeeding, with patriotic phrases, in making the people believe that its new friends (themselves) were more zealous than the old; and he appealed to the delegates from the primary assemblies to encourage the obedience of the people of Paris to the laws and their confidence in their lawmakers: to support the

authorities, in short, against the threat of insurrection.²²

Robespierre feared insurrection; but he also feared the consequences of establishing constitutional rule. On the night of the eleventh he was almost beside himself with anxiety: he told his fellow Jacobins that all of France's generals were accomplices of the traitor Dumouriez and that all of France's strongholds had fallen to the enemy because of treason; he attacked the revolutionary tribunal for the "insidious and pettifogging procedures" which hampered its operations; he demanded the arrest of all suspects. At one point, indeed, he had to stop, exhausted, until Hébert, temporarily presiding, restored order in the hall and gently encouraged him to continue.

Some reflections escaped me: the most important almost escaped me; it comes back, I am going to give it to you. I have heard, I have read, a proposal which was made this morning at the Convention, and I swear to you that even now it is difficult for me to believe it. . . . I declare that nothing can save the Republic if the proposal made this morning is adopted.²³

That morning, after ceremonies honoring the new constitution, the deputy Delacroix, another friend of Danton, had proposed that the Convention set up a new system of elections and thereby disprove the charge of the federalists that the deputies wished to perpetuate themselves in office.²⁴

. . . all those who know me [Robespierre continued] know that I desire only to re-enter the class of simple citizen, and that the burden of a consecutive administration of five years is too heavy for one man alone.

But the insidious proposal [that is, of Delacroix] is likely only to replace the men

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 328–30, 336–37.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 341–43.

²⁴ *Moniteur*, No. 224 (Aug. 12, 1793), p. 953; No. 225 (Aug. 13, 1793), pp. 956–58.

²¹ Aulard, *Jacobins*, V, 337.

purged from the present Convention with the envoys of Pitt and Cobourg.

The fear of new elections prompted Robespierre (as it had prompted Claude Royer) to demand new measures against suspects.

In the Convention the next morning (the twelfth) a great debate took place on the question of the *levée en masse*. It was initiated by Claude Royer, the *fédéré* from Chalon, who read to the Convention a revision of the speech he had made six days earlier to the Jacobins. The introductory section on the dangers of constitutionalism had been cut away; and the formulation of the *levée en masse* as a measure of internal security was more precisely stated than before:

Make an appeal to the people; may the people rise en masse; it alone can annihilate so many enemies. . . .

We ask you to decree solemnly that all suspect men will be placed immediately under arrest, in order to be precipitated from there to the frontiers, followed by the terrible mass of all the sans-culottes of the Republic. There in the front rank they will fight for the liberty which they have been outraging for four years or they will be immolated under the cannons of the tyrants.²⁵

That night at the Jacobins' Royer was somewhat more brutal, offering the suggestion that the "aristocrats" placed in the front line should be weaponless and enchained, "so as to avoid the inconveniences of a rout."²⁶

In the debate which followed two speakers stood out: Danton and Robespierre. Danton gave only qualified support to what he called "the initiative of terror against the enemies of the interior [which] the delegates of the primary assemblies have just taken among us"; for he asked that the arrest of suspects

should be handled more intelligently than heretofore and that they should not be sent against the enemy since "they would be more dangerous in our armies than useful." Danton placed the burden of his emphasis elsewhere: in the suggestion that the thousands of delegates from the primary assemblies be enlisted in the mobilization of France against the external foe:

If each of them incites twenty armed men against the enemy [Danton told the Convention] . . . the fatherland is saved. I ask that they be invested with the authority necessary for making this appeal to the people; that . . . they be commissioned to effect the inventory of grains [and] weapons [and] the conscription of men, and that the Committee of Public Safety direct this sublime movement. It is by cannon blows that the Constitution must be announced to our enemies.²⁷

The proposals made by Danton recall the demands made earlier by his friends, the section-militant Sebastien Lacroix and Réal, the *procureur* of the Paris Commune.

With respect to Danton's proposals, Robespierre told the Convention, "I have nothing to say." He had much to say, on the other hand, in support of Claude Royer's demand for an arrest of suspects:

Let's not pretend; our enemies owe their successes less to their forces and even their perfidy than to our own neglect. . . . We have been too indulgent toward traitors.

The sole remedy to be taken is the speedy scouring from our armies of the aristocrats, the notoriously suspect, who dishonor them. . . . Think of it! The cowards and traitors [who] surrendered Verdun, Longwy, Belgium . . . are breathing still! . . .

How [can we] foil conspirators if they are sure of impunity? . . . May the sword of the law, planing with a terrible rapidity over the heads of conspirators, strike their accomplices with terror! It is necessary then to stimulate the zeal of the revolutionary

²⁵ *A.P.*, LXXII (Aug. 12, 1793), 101.

²⁶ Aulard, *Jacobins*, V, 345.

²⁷ *A.P.*, LXXII (Aug. 12, 1793), 102-3.

tribunal; it is necessary to order it to judge the guilty who are denounced to it twenty-four hours after the delivery of proofs; it is necessary, in addition, to multiply its action.

Robespierre was concerned not only about suspect generals, for he added:

I ask that France, the administrations, the government, the armies, be purged of traitors; that one busy oneself with punishing rebel administrators: that the revolutionary tribunal be instructed to judge [General] Custine within twenty-four hours.

And he suggested that the delegates from the primary assemblies be assigned the function of replacing counter-revolutionary administrators with proved and energetic patriots.²⁸

These proposals disclosed the flowering of Robespierre as a terrorist and foreshadowed the acceleration of the Terror which was to come. Inspiring them were his anxieties, anxieties awakened particularly by the political aspect of the encircling crisis: by the danger of insurrection from hunger by the Parisian left and by the danger of electoral successes by the provincial right. To meet this double danger he tried to convert the *levée en masse* into a system of repression which could serve as an alternative to both insurrection and constitutional government and as a safeguard of the current regime.

Instead, the Convention supported Danton's proposals, directing the *fédérés* to inventory food, horses, and weapons and to requisition troops, in accordance with the procedure which the Committee of Public Safety was instructed to prescribe through a special decree.²⁹ The

²⁸ Robespierre did refer also to their "exciting the energy of the people for the recruitment"; but he was unwilling to give them any specific assignment of this kind, as became clear two days later.

²⁹ The Convention also, as an afterthought, decreed the arrest of all suspects; but this was

Committee of Public Safety was very reluctant to accept this major responsibility.³⁰ Two days later, on the fourteenth, Barère spoke at length in the Committee's behalf, addressing himself particularly to the *fédérés* from the provinces:

Precious envoys of the primary assemblies [Barère began] . . . it is to you that the national Convention addresses itself today.

What mission are you going to receive? Will it be . . . a slow and painful recruiting operation? No, no! a more august function is reserved for you. . . . It is a moral and sacred mission, it is a patriotic and religious function that you are going to exercise in the most distant cottage and in the meanest commune. Your mission is to present the needs of the fatherland.³¹

Or, to put the matter less elegantly, their mission would be confined to making speeches on behalf of the regime and its policies. Barère not only cut the heart out of Danton's program; he described requisitions of food and of soldiers as the measures of despotism, of a Duke of Brunswick.

In his reply to Barère, Danton paid his respects to the Committee's report, in order to resume the battle. Stronger measures were necessary, he told the

only a gesture, a nod in the direction of Robespierre; for such a decree had already been passed on June 2, more than two months before (*ibid.*, p. 104; Louis Jacob, *Les suspects pendant la Révolution, 1789-94* [Paris, 1952] pp. 40-41). The law of suspects of June 2, proposed by Jeanbon Saint-André of the Committee of Public Safety, was the first law to require (rather than merely encourage) the established authorities throughout France to seize and arrest persons suspect of "aristocracy and incivism."

³⁰ It is therefore misleading to say, as Mathiez does, that "the Committee of Public Safety did not hasten to bring to a vote the decree which they [Danton and Robespierre] had demanded" (*Révolution*, III, 38). It was Danton's proposals which the Committee was resisting; Robespierre was a member of that committee and repeatedly disclosed his opposition to them.

³¹ *A.P.*, LXXII (Aug. 14, 1793), 156-60.

Convention, as he asked it to assign more positive and more extensive powers to the *fédérés*: the power, particularly, to conscript recruits from "the first class." He also asked the Convention to name representatives-on-mission to work with the *fédérés* "so as to arm this national force, provide for its subsistence and direct it toward a common goal." Both of these motions became law, amid applause.³²

That night, however, at the Jacobins', Robespierre argued that "our brothers from the *départements*" were not yet well enough known to be trusted with a public mission. He expressed his regrets that the *fédérés* were not remaining "with us long enough to be able to determine and execute together with us the means which remain . . . for saving the fatherland"; and then, abruptly, added: "I declare that this magnanimous, but perhaps enthusiastic idea of a *levée en masse* is useless; it is not men that are lacking to us but indeed the virtues of generals and their patriotism."³³ Interrupted by the demand that he become specific and propose methods, Robespierre first attacked his challenger ("The agents of the English faction sneak into the purest societies," etc.) and next renewed his appeal for "action against domestic enemies":

It is not enough to declare war on Georges and all those men one calls potentates. . . . if one does not enchain the men they pay to favor their projects, the Republic will not be saved. . . .

I summarize:

Dismiss the generals. . . .

Replace the present administrations with honest men. . . .

Fall on all these odious journalists. . . .

³² *Ibid.*, p. 166.

³³ Aulard, *Jacobins*, V, 349–50. Buchez and Roux, XXVIII, 464–66, citing *Le Républicain français*, No. 274.

The *levée* in its other form, as a *levée* against suspects, was then proposed. Aristocrats were to be dragged to the front, chained together, six by six. Robespierre, as president, asked Claude Royer to have the Paris sections appoint representatives to meet on the sixteenth with both the *fédérés* and the Jacobins, to discuss "means of saving the state."

Something misfired. The petitioners who descended on the Convention on the sixteenth represented the *fédérés* and the Paris sections, but not the Jacobins; and Claude Royer had been replaced as spokesman by another *fédéré*, named Poulard. Where Robespierre had implied that Danton's conscription proposals went too far, Poulard protested that they did not go far enough:

Amid extreme dangers [he told the Convention] half measures are always mortal. If you ask for one hundred thousand men, perhaps you will not find them; [but] if you ask for millions of republicans, you will see them rise to crush the enemies or liberty. . . . May no one be excepted [except those needed for harvesting] . . . may the means of execution not disturb you. Decree only the principle: we will present to the Committee of Public Safety the means of making the national thunderbolt burst upon all the tyrants and their slaves. [Much applause.]

The *fédérés* had deserted Robespierre, who had expressed his lack of confidence in them, and, in joining the Paris sections, had accepted their interpretation of the *levée en masse*, the program of general mobilization demanded earlier by Sébastien Lacroix.³⁴

A few minutes later Barère replied to their proposal, in the name of the great Committee. He asked the Convention to decree the solemn declaration that the French people was going to rise as a whole for the defense of its independence; the Convention did so. This de-

³⁴ *A.P.*, LXXII (Aug. 16, 1793), 251, 261–62.

cree of the sixteenth is, properly speaking, the decree of the *levée en masse*. It was a decree of the principle of the *levée*.³⁵

Barère promised to provide the movement's mode of organization on the morrow; but he had nothing further to offer then or for several days to come. Finally, on the twentieth, a Dantonist deputy named Mallarmé challenged the Committee to declare whether or not it could fulfil the duties intrusted to it and present the awaited plan.³⁶ A moment later, Barère reported, but (for once) very badly; he was not prepared; his proposals were vague and unco-ordinated. One of them named seventeen centers of counter-revolutionary movements as assembly points for the *levée*; and this suggested that the Committee was planning to devote the *levée* to the struggle against domestic enemies.³⁷ After he had spoken, the Jacobin alternative to mobilization was revived, Chabot and other deputies (Amar, Tallien) asking that priority be given to the arrest, or expulsion, of all suspects:

Citizens [Chabot argued], in a Republic it is necessary that one party crush the other: open the history of your country and you will see the Catholic party destroying the Calvinist party. I ask that my proposal be put to voice vote.³⁸

Danton spoke also; and the murmurs of disapproval which Chabot had provoked were now replaced by applause.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Articles 6 and 7 of the decree incorporated Robespierre's earlier proposal of a purge of local officials and their replacement by "patriots."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 513, citing the *Journal de Perlet* for Aug. 21, 1793.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 448, citing the *Moniteur* for August 21. Three days later Barère told the Convention: "The original idea of the Committee was to achieve a reunion of armed citizens near each army and each center of civil war" (see *A.P.*, LXXII [Aug. 23, 1793], 680).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 488-89, 510-15.

He returned to the principle of general mobilization, but at the same time urged the Convention to be realistic in carrying it out:

. . . in order to march, weapons and bread are essential; now, do you have enough weapons and bread to have all Frenchmen march at once? No, doubtless. It is then necessary to co-ordinate their enrolment with the amount of weapons and bread which you have available for them.

Barère brought the debate to an end by supporting Danton, declaring that it was necessary that "this great popular movement be regularized" and that this would be done by the Committee of Public Safety.

Three days later, on August 23, Barère made good this promise. The celebrated decree which he now proposed (after a lengthy explanatory report) was drafted by Barère himself in conjunction with Carnot, the military expert who had been added to the Committee just nine days before; and it incorporated the demands which had been voiced by Sébastien Lacroix, Réal, and the sections, had been given practical form by Danton, and had been accepted, after considerable reluctance, by the Robespierist Committee of Public Safety.³⁹

The decree of August 23 placed all Frenchmen under permanent requisition for the service of the armies (Article 1). The obtaining of substitutes was no longer permitted, whether a man's assignment was military or non-military (Article 7). Since, however, it was sufficient to make use of the levies gradually, only the unmarried men and childless widowers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five were required to assemble immediately in the chief towns

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 674-75, 688-90. The body of the draft is in the hand of Carnot; the corrections (stylistic, in the main) are in the hand of Barère.

of their districts; and perhaps, Barère suggested, not even all of them would be needed (Article 8).⁴⁰ The decree also placed animals and weapons under requisition: saddle horses for the cavalry, draft horses for the artillery, military weapons for those who marched against the enemy (Articles 4, 3). It also called for the immediate establishment of an extraordinary manufacture of weapons of every type, to be centered at Paris, and provided for the requisition of articles and of persons which this enterprise would need (Article 5).⁴¹ The motivation behind this was not purely military. Barère told the Convention that Paris needed an establishment of this kind in order to employ her population and that other *départements* as well would enrich themselves through this industrial development.

On the matter of obtaining bread for the expanding armies, the decree was extremely prudent, requiring only that delinquent taxpayers pay their debts in grain and that the administrators (and tenants) of national land bring their produce to the chief towns of their districts (Articles 13, 14). Barère did, however, assert the principle that a society has the right to demand the sacrifice even of property; and he recalled with approval George Washington's threat to resort to confiscation should the cultivators of Pennsylvania and New Jersey refuse to sell at the legitimate price. "The army of Washington was provisioned. Useful lesson to greedy tenant-farmers, aristocratic proprietors . . . moderates or misers."

That the decree had serious intentions was indicated, finally, by several articles having to do with its operation. Eighteen representatives-on-mission, named in the decree, were intrusted with its execution (Article 15). They were to determine the assembly points to be used by the armed citizens as circumstances should demand, after consultation with the generals and in concert with the ministry and the Committee of Public Safety (Article 10). In performing this task they would (following Danton's advice) co-ordinate the assembling of men with the assembling of sufficient food and provisions (Article 9).⁴²

III

The decree of August 23 represents the Committee of Public Safety's somewhat reluctant response to pressures created as much by hunger as by the approach of foreign armies. It was a serious decree. The earlier decree of the sixteenth had proclaimed the principle of a *levée en masse*. This decree promised less but provided more; for it outlined a practicable program for strengthening the war effort and for stimulating the economy. It should be added that the execution of the decree was immediately begun.⁴³

But many were disappointed by it, including the *enragés* and their feminine

⁴⁰ For Barère's report commenting on the various articles of the decree, as well as on the problems involved, see *A.P.*, LXXII (Aug. 12, 1793), 676–80.

⁴¹ On August 23, 1793, the C.P.S. began putting this article into execution, calling to Paris both workers and models (*maquettes*) from the arms-manufacturing centers Tulle, Charleville, and others (Aulard, *Recueil des Actes du Comité de salut public* [Paris, 1889], VI, 68–69).

⁴² The delegates from the primary assemblies were not forgotten completely. They were to return to their respective cantons, there to carry out the civic mission assigned them on August 14 and to await assignments from the representatives-on-mission of the Convention (Article 16).

⁴³ Aulard, *Actes*, VI, 60, 68–69; Pariset, p. 142. According to Pariset this decree was far more successful than the previous requisition of February and March 1793. However, Spenser Wilkinson argues the contrary in his *The French Army before Napoleon* (Oxford, 1915), pp. 139–40.

allies. On the very day of the decree, Leclerc used his newspaper to ask the Convention to decree a mass rising of all Parisian sans-culottes, an insurrection which would bring to the guillotine "hoarders, speculators, suspects, egoists"; and three days later his friend Claire Lacombe appeared before an unfriendly Convention to ask for a "a *levée* of men *en masse*," by which she meant, apparently, an insurrection against domestic enemies.⁴⁴

For somewhat similar reasons the decree disappointed also the Robespierrists among the Paris Jacobins. Hébert had already warned them, two nights before, that "aristocrats" might repeat at Paris the horrors of Lyon if the younger sans-culottes, who were the most ardent of the "patriots," should set out "en masse."⁴⁵ On the night of the twenty-third, Chaumette, the *procureur* of the Commune, argued the impossibility of the new decree and urged in its place the deportation from France of all aristocrats and other suspects; and another Jacobin (Brichet) urged branding the deportees on the forehead with a hot iron to prevent their return. Robespierre himself, presiding, returned to the argument with which he had previously, unsuccessfully, opposed Danton's proposals. Since it is not difficult to raise men and horses (he said), the society should concentrate on destroying the enemies of the public welfare.⁴⁶

Robespierre's position here had the merit (if it is a merit) of consistency. Eighteen months before he had been almost alone among revolutionaries in opposing the mounting demand for war.

⁴⁴ Gérard Walter, *La Révolution française vue par les journaux* (Paris, 1948), pp. 306–8, citing Leclerc's *Ami du Peuple* for Aug. 23, 1793; *A.P.*, LXXIII (Aug. 26, 1793), 56–57.

⁴⁵ Aulard, *Jacobins*, V, 367–68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 370–72.

He had urged at that time: "Let us get rid of our enemies of the interior, war on conspirators and despotism, and afterward let us march against Leopold."⁴⁷ Later, at the time of the military disasters of March 1793 he was far more interested in overcoming his Girondin opponents of the Convention than in suggesting military measures against the Austrians. Moreover, when Danton had urged new measures for reinforcing the French armies, Robespierre had sought a remedy in the purge of suspect officers, much as he did again in August à propos of the *levée en masse*.⁴⁸

For the debate of August 1793 over the *levée en masse* reflected not only a challenge offered by the hungry sections of Paris to a government fearful of explosive insurrection. It reflected also a struggle between the Dantonists, who were attempting to channel the dangerous energies of the sections into military power directed against external enemies, and the Robespierrists, who were striving to direct these same energies into the political repression of domestic foes.

In August of 1793 Danton won a battle against Robespierre; but Robespierre would win the war between them, as the Terror deepened under the leadership which he and the Hébertists continued to provide. The Revolutionary Tribunal would presently be enlarged and its procedure simplified. There still exists a paper in Robespierre's hand, prepared (apparently) in August 1793, recommending twenty-two patriots for positions on the tribunal. It is perhaps relevant to our analysis to note the one person among them to be recommended

⁴⁷ Georges Michon, *Robespierre et la Guerre révolutionnaire* (Paris, 1937), p. 57, citing Robespierre's speech to the Jacobins on Jan. 11, 1792; see also *ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁸ Guglielmo Ferrero, *Les deux révolutions françaises, 1789–96* (Neuchâtel, 1951), pp. 125–26.

for both judge and assistant public prosecutor. It was Claude Royer, the *fédéré* from Chalon.⁴⁹

Among the subsequent victims of the tribunal was the deputy Chabot, a defendant in the "Company of the Indies" scandal; but he was its victim only after many months in prison, during which Robespierre had sought excuses for him.⁵⁰ From prison Chabot had sent to Robespierre this message, which suggests what we do not know: "You [Chabot uses the familiar *toi*], who cherish patriots, deign to remember that you have included me in the list of them. . . . Above all do not forget that I am sick, in solitary confinement, for having punctually executed your orders."⁵¹ Also

among the tribunal's victims, brought to trial with a motley group of Girondins, and Hébertists, was the section-militant, Danton's friend Sébastien Lacroix.

And there was, finally, Danton himself. In the notes which Robespierre drew up for the use of Saint-Just, who would read the formal indictment of Danton to the Convention, some of Robespierre's grievances against Danton stand exposed. One of them is worth repeating. Robespierre appears to have had in mind the crisis of March 1793, rather than August. No matter: "When some new treason in the army gave to patriots the pretext [*sic*] for provoking some vigorous measure against the conspirators of the interior and against the [Girondin] traitors of the Convention, [Danton] was careful to get them forgotten or to alter them, by turning the attention of the Assembly unceasingly toward new *levées* of men."⁵²

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⁴⁹ *Papiers inédits trouvés chez Robespierre* (3 vols.; Paris, 1828), II, 12–13. Of the twenty-two, twenty-one (including Claude Royer, as assistant public prosecutor) were appointed (cf. *Moniteur*, No. 273 [Sept. 30, 1793], pp. 1157–58). August would seem to be the date from the appearance of the name of Herman (of Arras), as Robespierre's nominee for presiding judge of the tribunal. Herman was appointed to this post on August 28, 1793.

⁵⁰ *Papiers inédits*, II, 63–69.

⁵¹ Chabot to Robespierre, 4 frimâire, an II (November 24, 1793). Reprinted in A. Mathiez,

L'Affaire de la Compagnie des Indes (Paris, 1920), 179.

⁵² Albert Mathiez, *Robespierre terroriste* (Paris, 1921), p. 104.